

Maryland General Assembly: **(FAV) Support for HB 345/SB 174**
Testimony by: Lori E. Firestone (therapist in private practice in Maryland)

January 23, 2025

To the Honorable Maryland Assembly House and Senate Committee members, I would like to express my support for HB 345/SB174, the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. This legislation would **streamline the licensure process** to allow social workers to more effectively provide services across state lines. This not only benefits practitioners, but also **ensures that individuals in need of services can access qualified professionals**, irrespective of state boundaries. Other benefits include enhancing the mobility of social workers, improving continuity of care when clients travel or relocate, and more integrated data management for licensees for more efficient licensure verifications and other pertinent information about licensing status.

I wanted to provide a first-hand account of the challenges I have faced as a result of the current system with respect to social work licensure. Before moving to Baltimore in 2022, I lived in Washington, DC. This area is informally known as 'the DMV' because of **the District's proximity to both Maryland and Virginia**. It is very common for clients in this area to live in one state and work in another. A social worker is supposed to be licensed in the state where the session takes place. The majority of the time, clients would come to my office and there was no issue. However, a fair amount of my clients held professional jobs that required frequent travel and short term assignments. For example I have worked with clients employed by Peace Corps, the State Department, federal safety agencies, and various other high-profile positions. **Technically, by doing sessions when clients are out of area, we are in violation of the statutes.** This also holds true for phone calls when clients are not well enough to come in for sessions or on snow days. I have spoken with many colleagues and it is a risk we have incurred in the interest of continuity of care, however it is accompanied by a sense of internal conflict and anxiety that we do not need to carry.

Getting licensed in just three states is one issue. I have known colleagues to pay for and maintain their licenses in DC, Maryland and Virginia in order to be in compliance with the exceptions to in-office care. However, due to the pandemic and economic realities, many of our clients were forced to relocate out of state. These were not consolidated, but scattered across many jurisdictions. I personally had clients move to Pennsylvania, Maine, New Jersey, North Carolina, Illinois and Ohio. **I believe it is an unreasonable standard for social workers to maintain licensure in each individual state.** On the surface, it may seem logical to transfer our clients; however this does not take into consideration the complexities of the situation. Many of the people I work with have experienced serious depressive episodes with suicidal ideation, extreme anxiety/panic, trauma, grief and loss. It is hard for people to "start over" and even if they are willing, many discover a lack of available providers or extensive wait lists. **It would be disruptive at best, and traumatizing at worst, for these clients to find a new therapist**, especially when they are experiencing diminished capacities.

Finally, the second standard in the NASW Code, under the Ethical Responsibility to Clients section, states that social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination. I support my clients' right to choose to remain with the therapist with whom they have established a deep rapport and trust. In conclusion, I ask that you support HB 345/SB 174. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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